

## How To Make Field Notes

(Adapted from [nrs.ucop.edu/host/curriculafieldnotes-handout.pdf](http://nrs.ucop.edu/host/curriculafieldnotes-handout.pdf) by Jim Johnson.)

Your objective is to create an accurate written record of your field activities, investigations, observations, and thoughts. You should record date and location information in very detailed manner so that others can know exactly when, where, and under what conditions your work was done. This will enable you or others to return to the same areas in the future to verify findings and observe changes over time.

### GENERAL FORMAT

Follow this format in your field notes:

1. Field notes should be divided into two sections: Journal and species accounts.
2. Write on one side of the paper. Leave a generous left margin.
3. Write the date at the top of the paper
4. Write "Journal" in the top margin of your journal pages, and the name of the species in the top margin of your species accounts pages.
5. Write in complete sentences and paragraphs. You can think of field notes as a letter to a friend or relative explaining what you was, or think of them as a letter to someone visiting the area 20 years later who is unfamiliar with the area.

### FOR THE JOURNAL SECTION

1. Put a heading on the top line of each page, which identifies your location. You should include specific site, city, county, and state. Underline the heading.
2. Note the purpose of the trip (Why?).
3. Note who went on the trip with you (Who?).
4. Note the time of day of each important observation (When?).
5. Information about the places you visit should be written so that someone unfamiliar with the area can find your exact location using maps and your description. Tell where you started and where you went. Include what road or trail you walked on, or the general route you took if you did not follow a road (Where?).
6. Include notes on the weather, elevation, topography, geology, soil, water, vegetation types, plant phenology (what life stage they are in), and evidence of disturbance (for example, fire, grazing, or cultivations) (What?).
7. Be accurate. If you have to guess about something, identify your guess as a guess. It is appropriate to speculate about things and to ask questions. Do include your feelings, intuitions, and thoughts! Just be sure you don't mislead a reader into thinking your thoughts are facts!
8. Be detailed and quantify your data as much as possible. "Saw some ducks on the pond" is not as useful as "saw 12 pintail (7 males and 5 females) on the southeast end of Olcott Lake about 5 m from the shore".
9. Sketches and drawings can be very useful. Rough sketches and diagrams add details and depth to your notes. Photographs are very helpful.

10. You may take temporary notes in a smaller field notebook, and then transcribe your notes into your permanent journal. Or, you can take them on a separate page, then transcribe them into the proper format and fill in the blanks. You should transcribe as soon as possible after you leave the field, and ALWAYS on the same day as your trip.
11. Do not simply recapitulate the lab methodology in the journal section. We are less interested in how the lab was conducted than in what you observed during the lab and your impressions and thoughts.
12. You may use your field journal to record notes from any lab, outdoors or otherwise. We will only grade the entries for labs with outdoor components.

### SPECIES ACCOUNTS

Create a page each for at least 3 species you observe in a particular lab or field trip. The species accounts page is the place for more detailed descriptions and observations of an individual or group of one particular species. Include sights, sounds, smells, textures, patterns, sizes, shapes, colors, and movements. Include numbers of individuals, sizes, frequencies, and behaviors. You may supplement your observations with information from other sources such as a guidebook or a web page. Photographs and especially drawings are encouraged.

You may repeat species accounts for up to 5 species over the course of the semester. The second account must provide additional information about the species, not simply repeat information from the first account.